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ABSTRACT

In April 2002, a special task force of the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse issued a report, A Call to Action; Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges. The report was the culmination of a 3-year, extensive analysis of research literature about alcohol use on college campuses, including: (1) the scope of the college drinking program; (2) the effectiveness of intervention programs; and (3) recommendations for college presidents and researchers on how to improve interventions and prevention efforts. The purpose of this brochure is to highlight practical information from A Call to Action that parents can use in choosing a college for their son or daughter and to help parents better understand campus culture. Parents contribute to the decision making of their children by helping them choose the right college, which means being aware of campus statistics on alcohol use and college policies related to alcohol. Staying involved is crucial, especially during the first 6 weeks on campus. Parents should find out about the campus environment and make sure that their children understand the penalties and consequences for underage drinking and any abuse of alcohol. Parents who must face an alcohol-related crisis need to be aware of sources of help. A list of resource materials and organizations is included with this brochure. (SLD)

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What Parents Need to Know About College Drinking

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National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
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PARENTS

In April 2002 a special Federal Task Force of the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism issued its report titled *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges.* The Task Force was composed of college presidents, alcohol researchers, and students. The report was the culmination of a 3-year, extensive analysis of research literature about alcohol use on college campuses, including:

- the scope of the college drinking problem
- the effectiveness of intervention programs currently used by colleges and communities
- recommendations for college presidents and researchers on how to improve interventions and prevention efforts

The purpose of this brochure is to highlight practical information from *A Call to Action* that parents can use in choosing a college for their son or daughter, and to help parents better understand campus culture. The full report of the Task Force and additional supporting documents are available at www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov.

A Snapshot of Annual High-Risk College Drinking Consequences

What do we know about the extent and impact of alcohol abuse on college campuses? The recently published data compiled below illustrate that **each year** the consequences of college drinking are more significant, more destructive, and more costly than many Americans realize. It is also important to remember that these consequences may affect your son or daughter **whether or not** they drink.

- **Death:** 1,400 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes.
- **Injury:** 500,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are unintentionally injured under the influence of alcohol.
- **Assault:** More than 600,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.
- **Sexual Abuse:** More than 70,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.
- **Unsafe Sex:** 400,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 have unprotected sex and more than 100,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report having been too intoxicated to know if they consented to having sex.
- **Academic Problems:** About 25 percent of college students report academic consequences of their drinking including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.
- **Health Problems/Suicide Attempts:** More than 150,000 students develop an alcohol-related health problem and between 1.2 and 1.5 percent of students indicate that they tried to commit suicide within the past year due to drinking or drug use.

- **Drunk Driving:** 2.1 million students between the ages of 18 and 24 report driving under the influence of alcohol last year.

- **Vandalism:** About 11 percent of college students report that they have damaged property while under the influence of alcohol.

- **Property Damage:** More than 25 percent of administrators from schools with relatively low drinking levels and over 50 percent from schools with high drinking levels say their campuses have a "moderate" or "major" problem with alcohol-related property damage.

- **Police Involvement:** About 5 percent of 4-year college students are involved with the police or campus security as a result of their drinking. An estimated 110,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are arrested for an alcohol-related violation such as public drunkenness or driving under the influence.

- **Alcohol Abuse and Dependence:** 31 percent of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse and 6 percent for a diagnosis of alcohol dependence in the past 12 months, according to questionnaire-based self-reports about their drinking.

Parents: A Primary Influence

As a parent you continue to be a primary influence in your son's or daughter's life. You are key in helping them choose the right college so that they get the best education possible. At the same time, you also need to ensure that when they go off to college they live in a safe environment. There are three distinct stages in which you, as a parent, contribute in critical ways to the decision-making involving your college-bound son or daughter:

I. Parents of a High School Student — Choosing the Right College

- As you examine potential colleges, include in your assessment inquiries about campus alcohol policies.

- During campus visits, ask college administrators to outline in clear terms how they go about enforcing underage drinking prevention, whether the school sponsors alcohol-free social events, what other socializing alternatives are available to students, what procedures are in place to notify parents about alcohol and substance abuse problems, what counseling services are available to students, and how energetic and consistent the follow-up is on students who exhibit alcohol abuse and other problem behaviors.

- Inquire about housing arrangements and whether alcohol-free dorms are available.

- Ask whether the college/university employs student resident advisors (RAs) or adults to manage/monitor dormitories.

Influence of Living Arrangements on Drinking Behavior

The proportion of college students who drink varies depending on where they live. Drinking rates are highest in fraternities and sororities, followed by on-campus housing. Students who live independently off-site (e.g., in apartments) drink less, while commuting students who live with their families drink the least.

- If there are fraternities and/or sororities on campus, inquire about their influence on the overall social atmosphere at the college.

- Ask if the school offers Friday classes. Administrators are increasingly concerned that no classes on Friday may lead to an early start in partying on the weekends and increased alcohol abuse problems.

Important Facts for Parents

A number of environmental influences working in concert with other factors may affect students' alcohol consumption. Excessive alcohol use is more likely to occur in colleges:

- where Greek systems dominate (i.e., fraternities, sororities)
- where athletic teams are prominent
- located in the Northeast

- Find out the average number of years it takes to graduate from that college.

- Determine the emphasis placed on athletics on campus and whether tailgating at games involves alcohol.

- Find out the number of liquor law violations and alcohol-related injuries and deaths the campus has had in previous years.

- Finally, consider the location of the college and how it may affect the social atmosphere.

II. Parents of a College Freshman — Staying Involved

- Pay special attention to your son's or daughter's experiences and activities during the crucial first 6 weeks on campus. With a great deal of free time, many students initiate heavy drinking during these early days of college, and the potential exists for excessive alcohol consumption to interfere with successful adaptation to campus life. You should know that about one-third of first-year students fail to enroll for their second year.

- Find out if there is a program during orientation that educates students about campus policies related to alcohol use. If there is one, attend with your son or daughter, or at least be familiar with the name of the person who is responsible for campus counseling programs.

- Inquire about and make certain you understand the college's "parental notification" policy.

- Call your son or daughter frequently during the first 6 weeks of college.

- Inquire about their roommates, the roommates' behavior, and how disagreements are settled or disruptive behavior dealt with.

- Make sure that your son or daughter understands the penalties for underage drinking, public drunkenness, using a fake ID, driving under the influence, assault, and other alcohol-related offenses. Indicate to them that you have asked the college/university to keep you informed of infractions to school alcohol policies. [For alcohol policies on college campuses see www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/policies]

- Make certain that they understand how alcohol use can lead to date rape, violence, and academic failure.

III. Parents of a College Student
Facing an Alcohol-Related Crisis — Getting Assistance

- Be aware of the signs of possible alcohol abuse by your son or daughter (e.g., lower grades, never available or reluctant to talk with you, unwilling to talk about activities with friends, trouble with campus authorities, serious mood changes).

- If you believe your son or daughter is having a problem with alcohol, do not blame them, but find appropriate treatment.

- Call and/or visit campus health services and ask to speak with a counselor.

- Indicate to the Dean of Students, either in person or by email, your interest in the welfare of your son or daughter and that you want to be actively involved in his or her recovery despite the geographic separation.

- If your son or daughter is concerned about his or her alcohol consumption, or that of a friend, have them check out www.alcoholscreening.org for information about ongoing screening for problems with alcohol.

- Pay your son or daughter an unexpected visit. Ask to meet their friends. Attend Parents' Weekend and other campus events open to parents.

- Continue to stay actively involved in the life of your son or daughter. Even though they may be away at college, they continue to be an extension of your family and its values.

In 1999, a majority of college and university presidents identified alcohol abuse as one of the greatest problems facing campus life and students. *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges* presents a series of recommendations to college presidents, researchers, parents, and students to deal with this continuing public health problem in a scientific and sensible way. We encourage parents to continue to educate themselves by referring to and using the following materials prepared by the Task Force. The documents on the following page are available in full text at www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov.

RESOURCES

The following materials are available from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) by mail or through the NIAAA Web site (www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov):

Task Force Report

- *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*
  Final Report of the Task Force on College Drinking

Panel Reports

- *High-Risk Drinking in College: What We Know and What We Need To Learn*
  Final Report of the Task Force on College Drinking's Panel on Contexts and Consequences
- *How To Reduce High-Risk College Drinking: Use Proven Strategies, Fill Research Gaps*
  Final Report of the Task Force on College Drinking's Panel on Prevention and Treatment

Brochures

- *What College Presidents Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Parents Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Peer Educators and Resident Advisors (RAs) Need to Know About College Drinking*

Future Brochures

- *What High School Guidance Counselors Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Community Leaders Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Students Need to Know About College Drinking*

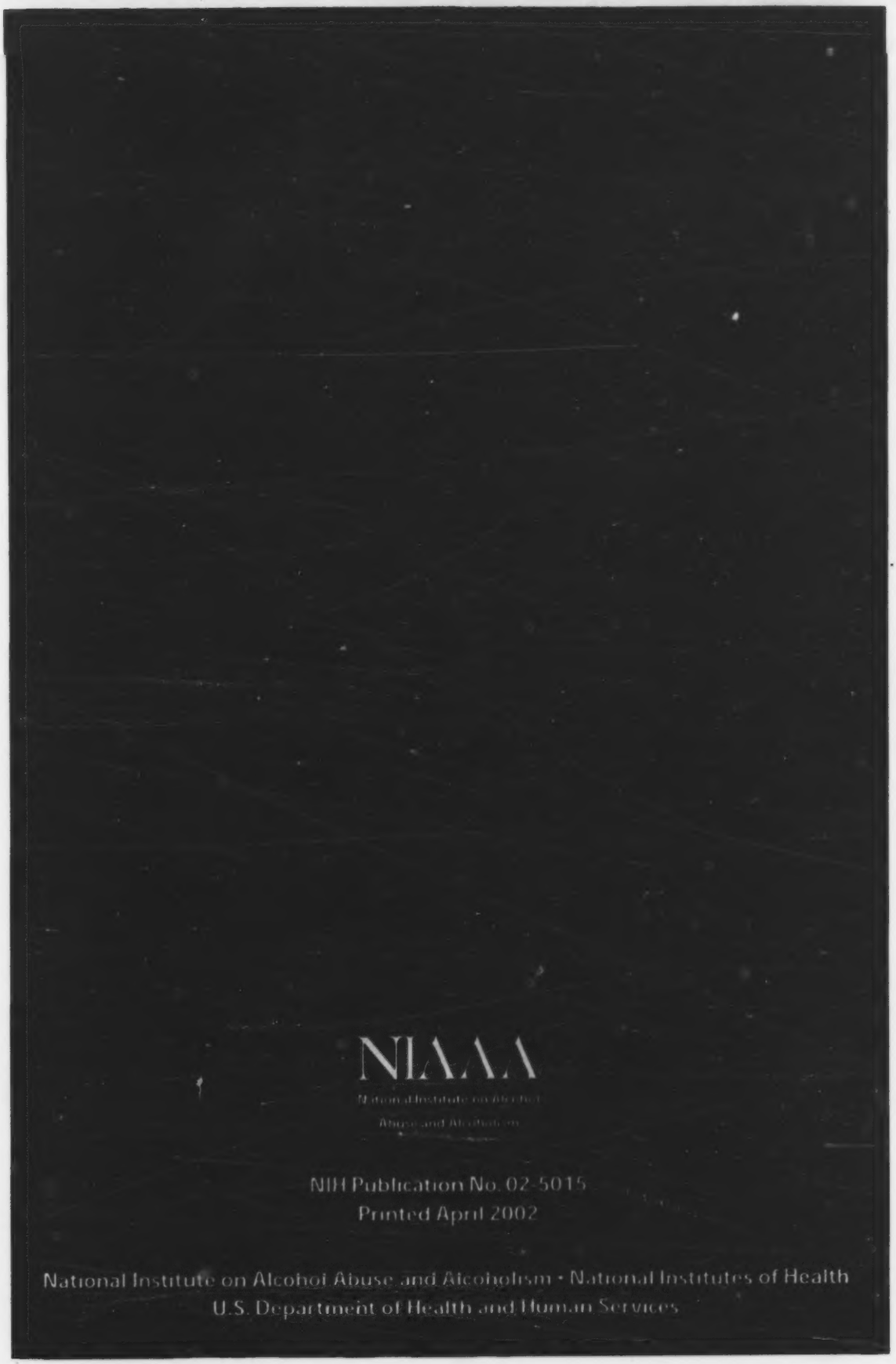
Planning and Evaluation Handbook

- *Reducing Alcohol Problems on Campus: A Guide to Planning and Evaluation*

Online Resources

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
  www.niaaa.nih.gov
- NIAAA Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free
  www.alcoholfreechildren.org
- NIAAA Kids Web Site
  www.thecoolspot.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
  www.nhtsa.dot.gov
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
  www.samhsa.gov
- U.S. Department of Education
  www.ed.gov
- U.S. Department of Justice
  www.usdoj.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
6000 Executive Boulevard, Willco Building
Bethesda, Maryland 20892-7003



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